

**Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Amherst Public Hearing**

April 26, 2008, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Hearing minutes

Present Commissioners: Linda Cavaoli, Debbi DiMasi, Marianne Fleckner, Pam Malumphy, Azell Murphy Cavaan

Staff: Jill Ashton, Linda Brantley, Kim Sebastio

Attendees: Lois Ahrens, Anne D. Brossard, Patricia Cardoso, Ann Cormier, Nancy deProse, Emily Franklin, Ann Ferguson, Karen Gooden, Marjorie Hutter, LaWanza Lett-Brewington, Hind Mari, Mary McCarthy, Nancy Maynard, S. McLaughlin, Juliana Morgan-Trostle, Jessica Montagna, Kristen Palpin, Irene Patch, Nancy Campbell Patteson, Ann Poole, Lena Sclove, Niki Sremac, Toni Troop, Diane Williams

Welcome

Sandra Mandel, Associate Director at the Everywoman's Center, welcomed attendees and the Commission to the hearing. She urged participants to speak truth to power, noting that the women on the Commission have power, but need the truth offered by the people who are willing to testify.

Chair Fleckner thanked the participants for coming to the hearing and introduced the Commission; she spoke about the agency's mission and the purpose of the hearing. At the request of Chair Fleckner, Commissioner Azell Murphy Cavaan, a Springfield resident, briefly reported findings specific to Western Massachusetts included in the MCSW's State of Women report. She noted that the Commission hopes to gain a greater understanding of the status of women in Western Massachusetts by hosting public hearings.

Testimony

Ann Poole representing Tapestry Health advocated for additional funding for family planning services and HIV/AIDS prevention. She noted the high teen birth rate in Hampshire County and that 25% of girls are living with a STI. Chair Fleckner requested additional information about Department of Public Health appropriations.

Nancy Maynard, representing Mass Home Care and Highland Valley Elder Service, read written testimony advocating for elders. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Hind Mari, representing Women of Color Leadership Network, presented written testimony about the challenges of racism and sexism faced by female students at UMass Amherst. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Chair Fleckner took a moment to recognize Representative Ellen Story and thank her for attending. Representative Story thanked the MCSW for holding a hearing in Amherst, noting that often constituents are asked to travel to Boston.

Marjorie Hutter, representing the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts, read written testimony prepared by Julie Kumble, Coordinator of Grants, Programs and Volunteers. She spoke about the challenges facing women in their community and the Women's Fund's commitment to addressing those issues. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

LaWanza Lett-Brewington, Executive Director, Safe Passage, testified about the challenges of providing domestic violence services to the many women in need. Safe Passage is the domestic violence coordinator for Hampshire County much of which is rural. She spoke about how the federal government defines rural, suburban and urban communities and how they allocate funding. She urged a more realistic and informed approach to funding and programming for domestic violence victims. Ms. Lett-Brewington reported that there is a need for broad-based services, more shelter beds, and increases in community services. In addition, she noted there is a need for a more informed court and judicial system, one which recognizes the challenges and needs of victims and supports and protects them throughout the legal process. Ms. Lett-Brewington suggested that it would be beneficial to have the Commission involved in the discussion of domestic violence and sexual assault issues in Massachusetts.

Ms. Mandel read testimony written by **Susan Dorazio** advocating for quality child care. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Lois Ahrens, presenting the Real Cost of Prisons Project, presented written testimony and requested that the funds which Governor Patrick recommended for expanding the jail for women in Chicopee be redirected to community-based and controlled drug and mental health treatment, job training and child care services. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Julian Morgan-Trostle, representing the Women's Rights Club at Amherst High School, read and presented written testimony about issues which young women face, including a lack of comprehensive health education. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Anne Cormier informed the Commission that she would like to raise the issue of storing umbilical cord blood. Cord blood has received much attention lately because of the debate around stem cells. The cells contained in cord blood can grow and adapt into further developed cells. The technology is lifesaving and has advanced health sciences. However, currently there are limited options for donating and banking; storage facilities are few and expensive. Ms. Cormier reported that she has given birth to three children and it was not until the last delivery that she was able to donate. She noted that donation should not be such a challenge. Ms. Cormier reported that legislation exists in Massachusetts that addresses the issue, but has never been adequately funded. Chair Fleckner asked Ms. Cormier to forward additional information about the issue and the legislation which she spoke of in her testimony to the MCSW.

Barbara Melrose testified as a member of the Abortion Rights Fund of Western Massachusetts. She reported that women's reproductive needs remain unmet. There is a lack of comprehensive health education, access to contraception, and access to abortion. Massachusetts is one of only 16 states that provide Medicaid funding for abortions, however women without insurance face significant barriers. The inability to get abortions places women on and keeps them in need of public assistance; often it derails education, keeps them with abusive partners, and bears addicted children. There are four funds in Massachusetts with a total budget of \$128,000 and providing loans and grants for between \$50 and \$650. She recommended innovative thinking to provide contraception and reduce abortions, for example working with community health centers or community programs, such as WIC. Also, access to emergency contraception must be made widely available and affordable. It is counter intuitive to delay access and increase the potential for unwanted pregnancy.

Toni Troop began her testimony by noting that the domestic violence community is currently experiencing great hope and sadness; there have been significant gains and at the same time it is experiencing record rates of domestic violence and domestic violence related homicides. She urged research on the new causes and factors which have manifested the current crisis. Ms. Troop

reflected that domestic violence organizations and law enforcement agencies were, three years ago, aware that there would be increases in domestic violence rates, because funds were being decreased or cut and lawmakers neglected to invest in an adequate infrastructure. She asked why funding has to be either or - either prevention or services, noting that it is more expensive to move a woman to a shelter than to keep her in her home. She recommended that the MCSW work with other state agencies and domestic violence organizations to apply pressure to systems, probate court and law enforcement, encourage community education, address the backlash of the father's rights movement. Ms. Troop concluded by urging a broad, comprehensive, and community engaged approach to preventing and responding to domestic violence.

Ann Ferguson testified that she is a recently retired professor of philosophy and women's studies. She spoke about the discipline of women's studies. Ms. Ferguson noted that she wanted to first emphasize the positive. Women studies programs came into existence in the mid-1970s and focused on the intersection of race class and sexually inequality. Organizations such as the Everywoman's Center have made substantial contributions to the advancement of women. However, in recent years there has been a stalling of process and an erosion of gains. Women are still discriminated against in the workforce, struggle with securing adequate child care, and are victims of domestic violence. Ms. Ferguson asked the Commission to advocate for more funding for higher education and women's studies programs.

Ms. Winters read testimony written by **Daria Fisk** which requested that the Commission study the barriers to advancement that low-income women face. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Jessica Montagna read and presented written testimony reporting the lack of adequate safe housing for victims of domestic violence. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Nancy deProsse, representing an informal group of parents with adopted children, presented written and oral testimony advocating for increased support by the state for families such as her own. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Marianne Winters presented written and oral testimony on the ways that Everywoman's Center, a university-based women's center providing essential counseling and resources, is promoting empowerment and access for women and offered recommendations in the area of policy, funding, and legislation. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

Irene Patch, a R.N working at Soldiers Home in Holyoke, presented written testimony and asked for help resolving a safety issue at work. The full testimony is included in the appendix.

The Commission also received written testimony from an anonymous person advocating for a strengthening of restraining orders in Massachusetts, **Mary McCarthy** urging state support for adoptive families throughout the adopted child's youth, **Mary Valquez** requesting a review of needed changes to WEP/GPO in social security, and **Jess Wolfe** who spoke about living with HIV/AIDS. Full written testimony is included below.

Adjourn

The hearing was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Appendix



Mass Home Care

24 Third Avenue, Burlington, MA 01803

"There's No Care Like Home Care"



Highland Valley
ELDER SERVICES

for Quality Long Living

Testimony presented on behalf of Mass Home Care and Highland Valley Elder Services, Inc. by Nancy Maynard, Associate Director of Home Care, for Highland Valley Elder Services, Inc., 320 Riverside Drive, Suite B, Florence, MA 01062-2700.

1. All aging issues in our country are predominately women's issues, because most older people are women. The U.S. population, age 65 and over, is expected to double in size within the next 25 years. By 2030, almost 1 out of 5 Americans, which is approximately some 72 million people, will be 65 years or older. The age group, 85 and older, is now the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population.
2. Today, 59% of the population, age 65 and over, are women. However, when you get to the 85 and over population, those most at risk of disability and poverty, 71% are women. For every 100 women over the age of 85, there are only 41 men.
3. Many older women are caring for their spouses, yet spouses are not allowed to be paid as a caregiver in this state. They have to turn to their daughters and sons to provide the care. Allowing spouses to be paid caregivers will help us solve the severe shortage of caregivers for the elderly we will face as the baby boomers age.
4. Changes in the American family have significant implications for future aging. Divorce, for example, is on the rise, and some researchers suggest that fewer children and more stepchildren may change the availability of family support in the future for people at older ages. In 1960, only 1.6% of older men and 1.5% of women age 65 and older were divorced. By 2003, 7% of older men and 8.6% of older women were divorced and had not remarried. The trend may be continuing. In 2003, among people in their early 60s, 12.2% of men and 15.9% of women were divorced. This is one example of the shortage of caregivers we will face.
5. Many daughters who step in to care for their aging parents often are not paid. They also do not know they can become a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) for their parents or a Caring Homes provider, but these programs are only for low income people on MassHealth. Women and their daughters or sons, who are just over the MassHealth guidelines, receive nothing. For a son or daughter to step out of the workforce to care for an aging relative, he or she must get paid enough to survive economically and \$18,000 a year, which is the best we can do now, is just not enough.
6. Most professional caregivers, like homemakers and PCAs, are women. Their wages and benefits are terrible. PCAs have now organized, but most homemakers could make more money working in a fast food restaurant. We need to upgrade the wages and benefits these women receive.

7. More respite care programs are needed to give women a break from their caregiving, or else they will burn out, and leave the state with two people to care for.
8. Nationally, 66% of the people in nursing homes are women. In Massachusetts, 68% of the residents of nursing facilities in 2006 were women, which is almost 7 in 10. Our state has the 2nd highest rate of institutionalization of people over 65, and most of these people are women. They are not being cared for in the least restrictive setting. We need to shift our focus for long term care spending from over-reliance on nursing home care to community care first. Governor Patrick has begun to promote this, but the fact is that today we still spend 66% of our MassHealth dollars, which is more than \$1.6 billion, on institutional care and this is mostly for women.
9. When a woman turns 65 in this state, she may be thrown off MassHealth because of different income and asset rules. We need to standardize these rules, so that older women needing MassHealth are subject to the same eligibility requirements as younger women.
10. The rules for receiving MassHealth assistance with long term care are partially based on "spending down" your income. The current rules favor nursing homes and make it easier to qualify for MassHealth, than if you need care in the community. We need to level the playing field throughout our regulatory system to eliminate such incentives for nursing home care.
11. All of these changes will predominately help older women, because older women are the predominate demographic of aging. Their needs are as compelling as any other age group in our society. However, they are often less visible, because the needs of older women are often misunderstood, or ignored by the media and the public.

→ lots of budget line items

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Women of Color Leadership Network (WOCLN),
Office of Programs and Services for ALANA Students
Testimony by Hind Mari, Program Director
(413) 545-1670
hrmari@stuaf.umass.edu

March 26, 2008

I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify to the Commission on behalf of women of color on campus, citing some of the issues they face.

WOCLN was founded in 1993 as part of the Every Woman's Center (EWC) that served as its home until 2005, when it was moved to the Center for Student Development. WOCLN provides advocacy, mentoring and training for University women and community women of color in the 5-college area. Over the years, WOCLN has raised women's consciousness around issues of self-identity, self-care and self-expression through mentoring, workshops, events and programming.

The issues I will concentrate on in my testimony mostly come from anecdotes collected over time from the community of women of color on campus, specifically students. The same themes have been recurring, and the stories are consistent that they deserve to be shared here. They all revolve around Oppression, Access, Childcare, Retention and Violence.

In the Fall of 2007, there were about 18.4% students of color enrolled at UMass, both male and female. Women (white and non-white) comprised 48.8% of the student population (Office of Institutional Research-UMass Amherst). While there are no statistics available specific to the percentage of women of color (WOC) who were enrolled in the fall, anecdotally, women have discussed some of the barriers for themselves and other women of color entering college. Among the most cited obstacles are:

Oppression
Obstacles

- Women of color often report encountering racist behavior from their white peers, such as name calling, ignoring, objectifying and possibly violence
- Women of color experience sexual harassment, violence and other forms of sexism from many of their male peers
- Lesbian, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning and Transgender women of color are often not supported or harassed and have difficulty finding communities that are both compassionate and aware

- Women of color dealing with at least sexism and racism often report feeling alone and internalize the oppression directed toward them, this can result in serious mental, emotional, physical and spiritual harm

Recommendations

- Provide mandatory trainings, workshops and dialogue groups for students, staff and faculty to discuss and learn about oppression, social justice and liberation
- Require the UMass community to go through sexual assault/violence prevention classes
- Provide more financial support and programming that speaks to specific needs of students
- Have therapists/mental health specialist, specifically trained to work with students of color, and be available and accessible for women of color

Access

Obstacles

- Lack of academic preparation before students get to college
- Lack of funding for school: cuts to federal aid, cost/affordability of attending college as fees are very high; \$17,399 for in-state undergraduate students for the 2007/08 (Office of Institutional Research-UMass Amherst)
- Complex financial aid process and admissions policies
- Federal government's Welfare to Work program makes it harder for women to attend college

Recommendations

- More recruitment of women of color
- Concentrate recruitment where we can find them, like churches, youth organizations, and other places where they are
- Increase federal and state funding to make attending college more affordable
- More college prep programs specifically for students of color

Childcare

Obstacles

- Lack of subsidized childcare options for student mothers
- Cost of childcare is high especially for single parents
- Lack of eligibility for international students for most childcare subsidies

Recommendations

- Provide subsidies for women parents
- Have flex day options for parents; allow childcare to occur around class schedules
- Provide subsidies specifically for international women of color parents

Retention

Obstacles

- Lack of academic advising that is specific for students of color

- Lack of academic, social or cultural programs that are focused on supporting the students holistically, particularly students of color
- Lack of race/ethnicity specific academic programs
- Small number of faculty/staff of color on campus (only 2% are WOC faculty); students don't see enough role model faculty and are more likely to drop out
- Small number of students of color in general on campus. This leaves most students feeling they are the sole representation for their group; in their classes, residence halls, co-curricular activities
- Many students of color, including women of color are the first generation of college students in their families

Recommendations

- Provide adequate financial aid
- Restore academic and social programs that support students of color
- Recruit more faculty and staff of color
- Provide academic advising particularly for students of color
- Listen to student needs/wants and create supportive programs to assist them

Violence:

Obstacles

- Violence and silence around issues of violence on campus have reached extreme highs for all students
- Women are reporting feeling unsafe around campus
- Women who experience sexual or domestic violence are not given proper housing or economic, emotional or psychological assistance.
- Many women of color have reported that the campus environment feels hostile and uncomfortable

Recommendation

- Require all students to go through sexual assault/violence prevention classes
- Restore the Escort Services program for all students no matter what time of day
- Create specific funding for students who have experienced violence that includes costs for food, housing, and rehabilitation
- Provide trainings, workshops and dialogue groups for students to discuss and learn about oppression, social justice and liberation- as they relate to all of us. Anger and violence around difference will be acknowledged, discussed and diffused.

Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity and thanks to the Everywoman's Center for hosting these hearings. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

7:35

Subject: testimony on child care
From: susandor@crocker.com
Date: Sun, 23 Mar 2008 23:33:20 -0400 (EDT)
To: smandel@admin.umass.edu

To: Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
From: Susan Dorazio
Re: Child Care

As far as child care goes, women in Massachusetts are doubly cursed. As parents, they face formidable, sometimes insurmountable, hurdles trying to find affordable, high-quality care for their young children. As child care workers, they commit themselves to a career characterized by low status, low pay, and insufficient benefits. This should be no revelation to those of you serving on the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. An abundance of documentation exists on both these issues. What needs to happen is for Massachusetts women to unite for quality child care by linking affordability and accessibility to the rights of child care workers to good wages, benefits, and working conditions.

This was the conclusion our Child Care Advocacy Committee at the Nonotuck Community School (a unionized child care center in Florence, Mass) came to a few years ago. Since then, we have been working to expand the definition of child care advocacy to include the quality of the program, the quality of the workplace, and the quality of society as a whole. We have become convinced that demands and action must occur in all these areas if the women of Massachusetts are ever to create and maintain a just, equitable, and compassionate child care system.

Typically, child care advocacy efforts have focused on program quality, according to criteria pertaining to curriculum, teacher-child ratios and interactions, materials, equipment, parent-teacher relationships, and health and safety issues. Countless letters have been written and calls made by members of the child care community to legislators and newspapers calling for major increases in child care funding to ensure accessibility and affordability of child care services.

The Early Education for All campaign is an example of the positive aspects of this advocacy strategy. It is also an example of its shortcomings. While attention has been brought to the needs of young children and their families, the needs of child care workers have been largely ignored. Formal recognition is now routinely given to the critical position of teacher/care givers in the quality-care equation, but somehow our basic needs for financial stability, job benefits, and good working conditions never get specifically addressed. Instead, "training" becomes the panacea for the recruitment and retention of good teachers. Apparently, the "compensation" necessary to provide for oneself and a family will magically proceed from further course-work at night or on weekends. In our view, it's time for advocates both within and outside the child care community to fight a whole lot harder for the rights of child care workers if the system as a whole is to improve. A quality workplace is intrinsic to quality child care.

Last, but definitely not least, in our Nonotuck formulation of quality child care, is the quality of the society we all function in and are impacted by. Policies, programs, and strategies connect directly to visions, values, and priorities. In the U.S., the context for our social, political, and economic behavior is capitalism and militarism. The level of challenge we present to the status quo will determine the degree to which we women in Massachusetts overcome the injustices we face in our personal and work lives.

This process entails close scrutiny of all the systems-within-a-system, including child care. It requires an ongoing analysis of how and why the

various aspects of our society fit together, and the generating of creative solutions. But most of all, it will require energy, daring, and collective action. Deeper bonds need to be created between child care advocates and community activists. Child care issues must be on the activist agenda, and peace and justice issues on the child care agenda. Making connections between our issues will broaden the base of a movement for social change. It will heighten our sense of urgency, and provide allies for our mutual struggle. It will give us resources and support for directing our energy toward attaining our goals.

Demands and actions, based on our commitment to family and worker rights for all women, are essential to uniting Massachusetts women behind quality child care in its most comprehensive, egalitarian sense. For example, high-quality "early care and education for all" will require collective effort. Coalitions of workers in child care, education, health care, and the social services will need to take to the street as well as to the halls of the State House to agitate for progressive sources of revenue, such as a steeply graduated state income tax, and high taxes on luxury items. Only in this way, will child care be fully funded, for the sake of families and workers alike.

At the Federal level, child care advocates and community activists will need to unite in order to redirect national priorities from war to domestic spending. An immediate cut of 50% in the military budget should be our collective demand to politicians at every level of government, since military spending keenly and directly effects state and local programs and services.

Significant changes in the child care situation for children, families, and workers here in Massachusetts and around the country -- a situation that disproportionately affects women, and in particular young women, women of color, and low-income women--will not be possible without significant change in society as a whole.

Those of us in the child care community welcome and encourage the participation of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women in the effort to significantly improve the lives of women by bringing child care issues into a broad movement for social, political, and economic justice.

Susan Dorazio is a resident of Montague. She recently retired after 30 years as a teacher of young children in Franklin and Hampshire counties. She is also the Convener of the Women's Commission of the Socialist Party USA.

March 26, 2008

The Real Cost of Prisons Project

Lois Ahrens

5 Warfield Place

Northampton, MA 01060

lois@realcostofprisons.org . www.realcostofprisons.org

Public Hearing Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
March 26, 2008 at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Thank you giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Lois Ahrens. I am the director of the Real Cost of Prisons Project, a national project based in Northampton, MA.

In the five minutes allotted, I want to focus on how for women, incarceration is the dominant and costly response to drug and alcohol addiction and crimes committed as a result of addiction. The number of women imprisoned with sentences of more than one year grew by 757% between 1977 and 2004; for men it was 388%. Street drug convictions now account for nearly 1/3 of the women imprisoned. Poor women of color are, along with African American and Hispanic men, the prime targets of the War on Drugs. A report from the Pew Foundation released last month, found that one in 355 white women between the ages of 35 and 39 are behind bars and one in 100 black women are. This is not because African American women use drugs at a higher rate than white women.

Despite the unconscionable wreckage to lives and the always increasing financial cost, Massachusetts, like the rest of the country, continues building jails. Gov. Deval Patrick's bond bill filed in January includes funding for 56 additional cells for women at the Chicopee jail. The new jail has already cost \$26 million to build but that is only the tip of the iceberg since caging one woman in one of the current 210 cells for a year costs more than \$43,200.

Approximately half the women are incarcerated at the Chicopee jail are there because they are too poor to make bail of \$200 to \$500. Often they can be held pretrial for months. Most of the time, they will be homeless and without income upon release, further destabilizing their lives and placing the well-being of their children in serious jeopardy. Jail has become a debtor's prison.

The Massachusetts prison and jail budget did not suddenly grow to 98 percent parity with the state's funding for higher education overnight. It happened over more than 20 years, driven not by a sustained rise in crime but by long mandatory sentencing, use and abuse of school zone enhancements (especially by the district attorney of Hampden County) imprisonment of women and convicted of drug possession and the restrictive employment options due to CORIs. For poor women and especially African American and Hispanic women, incarceration is the primary response to substance abuse, mental illness and sexual abuse. Almost 85 percent of all women at the Chicopee jail, pretrial and sentenced, are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol.

No study has ever found that imprisoning women who are addicted to drugs is more effective than community based treatment yet imprisonment remains the model in the U.S. and in western Massachusetts.

Some of you may remember that last year a study was released that recognized MA on its progress for decarceration of women; however, that study was misleading and inaccurate in that it failed to recognize the growth of incarceration of women for up to 2 ½ years in county jails such as the one in Chicopee.

I urge the Commission to recommend to Governor Patrick that the money he requested in the current bond issue for expanding the jail for women in Chicopee be withdrawn and the funding go instead to community based and community controlled drug and mental health treatment, job training, and child care services for women who are addicted to drugs.

My name is Juliana Morgan-Trostle. I am a senior at Amherst Regional High School, and co-president of our school's largest club, the Women's Rights Club. When I was discussing what I should say tonight with Marianne Winters of the Everywoman's Center, she made a vital yet obvious point: why is there the *need* for a Women's Rights Club at our high school? And why are we *stigmatized* by our peers for promoting feminism, defying gender stereotypes, and generally standing up for women?

Yesterday at our weekly club meeting, I asked the 40 or so members what changes they would like to see take place within our school. Students mentioned promoting positive body image and incorporating sexual harassment and violence prevention education into all aspects of the curriculum. Currently, health education is the *only* class in which such topics are discussed, and even then simply touched on. In Amherst Regional High School, health is a mandatory one-semester course – meaning a mere 9 weeks or so of a class packed with information about drugs, alcohol, how to lead a “healthy” lifestyle, exercising, eating your fruits and vegetables, and of course, reproduction. In my ninth grade health class, we were given *misinformation* about emergency contraception. Now at Amherst Regional, students do not receive any type of health education until the tenth grade, when many of them have already become sexually active without adequate knowledge to protect themselves—a contributing factor to the statistic recently released by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: that one in four teenage girls has an STD.

Our health education system is not up to par. Students do not receive enough information or they receive the *wrong* information. They are not taught peer mediation, violence prevention, or given adequate resources to know what to do in such situations. A frantic mother approached me last year: her daughter, a sophomore, had been raped by a student in the school. When the mother went to the health room to ask the nurses what she should do, they didn't know where to refer her. The mother desperately approached *me*, a junior in high school at the time, for a referral to the Everywoman's Center. There must be a better system established for putting high schools in easy contact with their local rape crisis centers in order to help their students.

Women's Rights Club spends much of our energy on fundraising for local organizations such as the Everywoman's Center, the New England Learning Center for Women in Transition, The Women's and the Men's Resource Center for Change. These organizations face budget cuts year after year, forcing them to close down battered women's shelters or make choices like abolishing their rape crisis hotlines or cutting funding for youth outreach. There is a problem in our society when teenagers are the ones who must raise money to support the very centers which work to educate them and better their communities! Fund of W. Mass,

Amherst Regional High School is privileged to have a Women's Rights Club. The sense of community it creates is truly unique. Students who have grown up in violent homes, been raped, sexually assaulted, or otherwise mistreated have a haven in which they can feel safe, make friends with similar interests, and learn that they are not alone. However, most high schools do not have organizations like a Women's Rights Club, and do not know how to establish one.

We need updated, improved health education for all students as they *enter* high school, as well as violence and sexual assault prevention education in classes other than health. Organizations that work to empower women and eradicate oppression must be supported financially and in constant communication with school administration in order to better serve their youth. Such measures will ensure that teenagers live safer, healthier lives. Thank you.

ARHSwomensrights@hotmail.com

First I'd like to thank the Commission for coming out here to Western Mass and to the University in particular. We really appreciate your reaching out like this and meeting with us.

I would like to speak on behalf of women in some of the lowest paid jobs both here on campus and across Massachusetts. I work with the Labor/Management Workplace Education Program here at the University of Massachusetts where we offer educational opportunities for custodial staff, secretaries and clerical staff, food service workers, and the like, through the AFSCME and USA/MTA bargaining units here on campus and in conjunction with a variety of unions off-campus where we offer programs for employees of area businesses, other colleges, neighboring institutions, and communities.

Many of those we work with are in the lowest paid and entry-level jobs, so it should be no surprise that they are often predominantly women, especially in food service and secretarial positions. Furthermore, in many of these entry-level jobs, workers are new-comers to the U.S., with significant language and cultural challenges. Hence our program offers English language classes, adult basic reading, writing, and math skills, introductory and advanced computer classes, leadership development and communication skills, and so forth.

We are fortunate that our programs negotiate paid release time for employees to attend class as part of their work-day. This makes a huge difference, as so many at the lowest wage scales are using every moment outside of work simply to make ends meet and to fulfill various obligations from family care, to supplementing their incomes with second jobs many times, and working to cover all the bases it takes simply to stay afloat.

These workers are some of the ones most in need of education and training opportunities, as they are not only usually among the

lowest paid, but they are also often the least recognized and little applauded in society. So we should not be surprised that they often feel marginalized, discouraged, and dead-ended. Yet, we have found that with real chances to learn and grow, they blossom and often surprise both themselves and us.

There was the dining hall prep cook, for example, who began to take classes with us and started to think maybe there was another path for her. She eventually left her job and enrolled in a Special Education program at a nearby college. She shone there, got straight A's and went on to work in a local school system where she not only received exemplary teacher awards, but as a gay woman, she also helped organize gay/straight alliances and support systems for students. She's still there and thriving.

But she was one of the lucky ones who got approved to attend our classes. For every person who is allowed to come, at least one or two are denied work release time because the worksite managers feel they can't be spared or they may have already approved others, or in some cases the perception is that a dish-washer or janitor doesn't need even basic skills to do their job, much less more advanced ones..

And there are other reasons these workers struggle. One is that the lowest paid workers are often the most likely to be cut when lay-offs occur or budgets are tight. Hence these work forces are often stretched so thin that the workplace feels they can hardly afford to let even a single person miss work to attend classes.

Higher paid and professional staff, by contrast, have more work and scheduling flexibility and discretion to seek and attend training, and hence to advance. Also the lowest paid are often so short-handed, that stress builds up so much that they can't imagine being able to take any time from the job. And they may feel

vulnerable to lay-offs and worry that taking classes will appear to be shirking their job responsibilities.

Not only that, but even though the United States prides itself as the land of opportunity, many of these positions are looked down upon. If you're an entry-level dish-washer for example, there is often the assumption that you are fairly ignorant, lucky to have any job at all, paid to work and work hard at that, not to think, or to aspire to improve and advance. And you are often treated that way. I've actually heard workers say that they've been told directly by their supervisors when they offer an idea or suggestion, "You're not paid to think, get back to work," – hardly a response to build a person's confidence or sense of possibility.

Some in higher positions may assume, too, that an entry level worker is arrogant to think he or she can advance or participate in education and training opportunities. "Who does she think she is, anyway?" So again, denial, leading to discouragement and inertia. By the same token there can be wonderfully supportive supervisors, and these can make all the difference.

So what is my plea? It would be great if your commission could study the situations of these lowest paid women. What opportunities are there for them? And how could the state improve those, including looking at the larger context they are in related to image, respect, classism, vulnerability to lay-offs, to being systemically short-handed, highly stressed, and the like. And how can we work to build these opportunities so that those at the lowest rungs of the ladders have some hope of advancing, and some real possibilities of living up to their fullest potentials.

Examples that might help include funding educational opportunities to build self-esteem and confidence, funds that pay for fill-in workers to build in a margin in the workplace that allows for some to be absent briefly for training and education, skill

development beyond the most rudimentary, initiatives around classism and its corrosive effect, incentives for managers to encourage their workers to seek learning opportunities, to name just a few.

Thank you for your time and for your hard efforts on behalf of all of us.

Daria Fisk,

303 Goodell
Labor/Management Workplace Education Program,
UMass, Amherst, MA 01003
(413) 773-8948

Jessica L. Montagna
Testimony for the
Public Hearing with the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
Wednesday, March 26, 2008

I have come here today to bring forth the issue of domestic violence and safe housing in Western Massachusetts. There is a lack of safe houses and shelters in Western Massachusetts that exist for women to seek shelter, support, and advocacy when leaving abusive relationships. In all of the four counties (Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire, and Hampden) there are only five shelters for women widely spread throughout Western Mass. located in Springfield, Pittsfield, Greenfield, Northampton, and Westfield. I believe that merely five shelters are not enough to provide the full and comprehensive support and advocacy for the thousands of women who experience domestic violence. Statistics have shown that women are at higher risk of being hospitalized or killed when leaving abusive relationships. Because of this it is imperative that the State of Massachusetts further support existing shelters to provide comprehensive safe housing and aid for women who have left an abusive relationship but also to seriously consider generating funding for the creation of more organizations, specifically those that provide housing, in Western Massachusetts that will provide care for victims of domestic and gender violence.

Testimony before the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women March 26, 2009

My name is Nancy deProse and I am a working parent. Over the past 27 years I have raised 8 step, foster and adoptive children.

I am here to represent an informal group of parents with adoptive children that meets monthly here in Amherst, which happen to have started as a joint project of the Every Women's Center and the Amherst Family Center. All of our children have been very difficult,, they have been arrested, they have run away, they have been to jail, they have been in various school programs, (most of which did not work), they have been hospitalized, they have been sent away (those families that can afford wilderness programs and therapeutic schools). Many of our children no longer attend school even though they are high school age. We are at our wits end. Lucky for us we are all professionals with pretty flexible jobs, we are faculty at Smith and Mt Holyoke, we are nurses and teachers, therapists and early childhood educators, University professional Staff and writers. We have had the time to help our Children many parents do not have jobs that will let them do what we have been able to do and keep our jobs.

So here is what I believe families like ours need.

The state needs to do what it can to keep kids out of the DSS system to begin with—

Families need support to prevent child abuse and neglect

- Parenting programs cut down on abuse and neglect
- Home visit programs with new families,
- Parent support programs like the Amherst Family center
- Parenting programs and parent support programs in the community for school age children - attached to community centers, schools, etc

When children are adopted –

Mothers need:

- good supports to families in the workplace – paid time off, flexibility
- good supports for their families in an ongoing basis – community based services

When the children start to fall apart –

- Day treatment and outpatient programs are needed in the community
- Hospitalization, residential programs and other out of home placements are needed
- Educational services need to be available to communities and communities where families take difficult foster and adopted kids need some support to their schools
- 51As filed on parents of difficult children – whether foster or adoptive children can cause a teacher or nurse to lose their license.

It is the women in the families who most often handle the daily disruptions at school, take children to therapy, etc... and this totally disrupts their careers, and if they do not have a flexible workplace, can cost them their jobs.

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Testimony by Marianne Winters, Director, Everywoman's Center
413-545-5821
mwinters@stuaf.umass.edu

March 26, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to this Commission on the issues faced by women from the viewpoint of Everywoman's Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

EWC is a university-based Women's Center providing essential counseling and resource services, with programs on violence prevention and direct services aimed at Hampshire County.

I'd like to focus my testimony today on the ways that EWC is promoting empowerment and access for women and propose some recommendations for you to consider in the areas of policy, funding, and legislation.

Founded in 1973, the primary goals of EWC were to advocate for increased numbers of women to have access to public higher education as well as to improve the conditions and lives of women as they transition first into the university and then into their chosen professions. Now, in 2007, our mission is consistent, yet our goals and strategies have changed with in response to trends, resources, and the needs of new generations of students and community members.

Today women comprise approximately half of the student population at UMass, which on the surface could convince someone that educational equity has been achieved. The reality, however, is that women and minority students frequently report feelings of disconnection and even harassment within educational settings. Also, while the role and commitment of public higher education is to assure access to the education that students need to participate fully economically in society, too often, this promise gets broken due to the fact that most admissions processes do not take into account the needs of poor and working class students, first generation students, students who come from immigrant communities or communities of color, and students with a history of trauma, either abuse or neglect.

We recommend that the MCSOW promote policies and programs that are culturally relevant to young people and to non-traditional aged students which deal with the financial, educational, emotional, and family needs they will need to face when attending college.

We are currently working with a group of students who are new mothers and wish to breast feed their babies while returning to their studies and work. You already heard from one student whose experiences are unfortunately representative of many new moms.

We recommend that the University system establish lactation spaces on its campuses which would provide the space, privacy, hygiene, and comfort that would provide new mothers with the option to return to school and continue to breast feed their babies. And, that the MCSOW support House bill 1568, which would permit breast feeding in public, or as we like to refer to it, decriminalize public eating by infants.

Another area that we focus our attention on is violence against women. We are alarmed, along with many of our colleagues, that the homicide rate due to domestic violence in 2007 in Massachusetts has nearly tripled since 2005 with no end in sight to the escalation. Adequate funding for rape crisis centers and domestic violence programs has never been in place and is now more crucial than ever.

We recommend that the MCSOW support and actively advocate for funding for dv and sa programs at the level recommended by our statewide coalition, Jane Doe Inc.

At EWC, we are prepared to begin to address this alarming trend, but what we lack are the resources. With additional resources we would:

- Build a program that addresses the economic realities faced by survivors of violence so that they won't have to face a decision to live in poverty and homelessness with their children or live in violence.
- Maintain and monitor a system of advocacy within the criminal, civil, and probate courts which would provide survivors of violence with adequate legal representation, and systems that address their needs.
- Incorporate emerging knowledge regarding high risk assessment within our programs by increasing the training and staffing on our hotlines, counseling, and support groups.

Programs that build economic knowledge and self-sufficiency need to account for the safety needs of victims of domestic violence and the effects of financial battering when it has been part of the picture. Job training programs, career counseling, financial management programs that aim to change the financial picture for women need to be trained and account for the needs of women who are victims of sexual assault. Also, workplaces need to develop their effectiveness in assuring safety and job security for victims of domestic violence.

We recommend that a large scale training program be implemented for organizations that support economic development on the effects of domestic violence on financial stability. Additionally, that the Commission promote the development and implementation of workplace policies related to domestic violence that assure that victims of violence do not get penalized for time off for legal, medical, or emotional needs, and get their safety needs identified and supported.

Finally, violence is a large scale issue within Massachusetts. At EWC we hear from 300 individuals each year who have been impacted by sexual assault or domestic violence.

Acts of community violence such as the December 15 riot at the UMass campus, as well as individual assaults have impact in the community as a whole, resulting in a community that feels unstable and dangerous to all. Tragically, even our campuses are not immune to similar attacks as occurred at Virginia Tech.

EWC has embarked on a holistic prevention approach that educates individuals, students, faculty, community members, and administrators as bystanders. This means that violence is presented as a community issue and with specific actions that community members can take that could decrease the incidence of violence. This approach holds promise in interrupting the cycles of interpersonal violence and community violence while holding perpetrators accountable. Since the massacre at Virginia Tech, much of the focus in safety has emphasized gun violence, physical safety measures such as metal detectors and communication systems. While these may be necessary steps to take, a comprehensive violence prevention strategy is needed that admits that centers the discussion on issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class which are embedded in these acts of community violence, and that promotes more cohesive ways to live as a community.

We recommend that a widespread prevention campaign be implemented within the University of Massachusetts system that promotes community accountability through a bystander approach to prevention.

Once again, I thank you for this opportunity and invite you to contact me if you have additional questions regarding these recommendations. Thank you for bringing this hearing to western Massachusetts and for listening to the public recommendations as you go about your important work on behalf of women in the Commonwealth.

Irene Patch
11 Pendleton Road
Belchertown, MA
01007

413-323-7380
Email: barayon@msn.com

My name is Irene Patch I'm a RN working @ Soldiers Home in Holyoke as a staff nurse for 27 years. My testimony pertains to safety issues effecting women at work specifically parking. At present the 3-11:30 shift nursing staff has been told to park in the back lot which is poorly lit burned out bulbs- Upon arriving to work 3- 11:30 shift usually park furthest from the building due to the parking spaces open when nursing staff mostly women leave work @ 11:30 they evit the front door main entrances and walk around building to back lot. One security guard on duty it is impossible for this one guard to monitor the front unlocked door and back parking lot where the employees' cars are located. All doors to the back parking lot are locked if a problem occurs the nurse must run around to the front of the building to enter thru the main entrance. The 11-7 shift nursing staff feels there is a security breech when guard is in the back parking lot and not monitoring the unlocked door. The unions have offered solution but we are at an impasse because the Superintendent Paul Morin. I bring this issue to the commission because I feel security and safety issues for women at the workplace are very important. I hope that my testimony will result in educating employers such as Superintendent Paul Morin on the need for safe and secure parking at work sites.

Personal Testimony To the MA Commission on the Status Of Women

The restraining order system in this state is woefully inadequate in terms of offering women the protection they need. The terms that restraining orders are offered are ridiculously narrow.

From 2002-2005 I lived as a disabled adult in public housing. In 2003 a woman with severe mental health problems moved in next to me. For two years she emotionally terrorized me and put my health at risk and there was no protection anywhere in the system to stop her or protect me.

In the odd sub community that is public housing in this state, it is not the responsibility of the local director of the public housing authority to ensure that the residents are appropriate to one another. Unlike other residential communities, this is the not in any way the director's job. My complaints fell on deaf ears; the director did nothing.

Secondly, because a public housing community is falls under state jurisdiction the local police had no help for me either other than a wrist slap that did not deter this woman's determined socipathic behavior to stop.

Thirdly, when I tried to get a restraining order against her, JaneDoe.org told me that according to MA law because she was not a past partner and because she did not live with me there was no such restraining order available to me. This is ridiculous and shameful loophole in our system.

Everyday she made it her job to betray my boundaries and emotionally terrorize me. I was a sitting duck and my health took a downward spiral due her unabated attacks. This should not be allowed to happen.

If you want to protect women, restraining orders need to expand the availability of restraining orders and institute enforceable behavioral standards for public housing.

2) The State's attitude toward stoping rape is appalling and infuriating. The MA judicial system allows rapists, **if** they get convicted, to regularly get 18 months or two years whereas the women or child who was victimized will live with extraordinary psychological scars and a host of disabilities for decades of the rest of her life and yet the perpetrator will get a slap on the wrist and will most likely reoffend.

What is the deterrent to men who rape? In Hammurabi's time men were castrated for this crime and knew so in advance. In Native American culture men were banished and shamed for this violation. It just wasn't accepted.

If the Commonwealth truly cares and respects its women, then it would have stiffer long-term mandatory sentences without parole or the option of being reduced to men who rape.

If the State really cared, it would require self defense, martial arts and assertiveness training be provided to little girls at head start, nursery school, kindergarten, elementary school, day camp, junior high and high school, colleges and town recreation programs.

If the State really cared it would institute an ongoing public relations campaign thru the media, school system curriculums, town programs, the workplace, hospitals, etc so that professionals would stop being in denial that sexual assault is going on and training professionals to address and investigate possible warning signs that someone very well may be currently or previously was a victim of sex abuse/violence and may not be able to get out of the situation and needs help. The State needs to stop raising girls/women's to be victims and needs to stop allowing society to look the other way while these atrocities and human rights violations perpetuate.

In addition to sentencing, as part of restitution, perpetrators should be required to pay for at least ten years of psychotherapy for one or two hours a week at the rate of \$100 an hour and if he cant come up with it it should come out of his family or be garnished right from his wages. Requiring his family to kick in will create more incentive for more people to watch out for and prevent rape/sexual assault. The victim will need this money. Actually, ten years is not enough. I have been in therapy since I was 16 and now at 48 am still healing from the long term unintervened affects of childhood sexual violence.

If the State cared about its women, it would also provide profound abundant funding to help MA girls and women recover from the pervasive intrapsychic scars of sex violence. Currently, in my area in addition to the expert therapist I have that I pay out of pocket for, the only adequate help that's available to me is a wonderful Counselor Advocate hotline the Everywomen's Center provides. Other than that, none of the centers offering support to victims of sexual violence have funding to offer group counseling with expertly trained, seasoned skilled therapists. The groups that currently are offered offer peer support or individuals just starting their Masters degrees or individuals that are trained for the hotline but trained psychotherapists. Though I am determined to go to any lengths to speed my recovery from sexual violence and tried these groups, I was not able to get the kind of care, support and safety I needed to heal under those circumstances.

I know of a great deal of survivors in Western Ma and I see very few of them healing and reclaiming the quality of life they deserve and are entitled to and return to full functioning making use of the peer led supports the women's centers offer here. Healing from sexual violence requires much more than that.

The State needs to provide some serious money and have the local centers hire trained, seasoned specialist therapists in helping MA women heal from abuses and crime that they didn't seek out and that should never have happened to them.

All these recommendations would send the message that we don't accept rape, sexual violence or harrassment here in the Commonwealth of MA and wont allow it to go on unabated and unpunished.

If you need extraordinary input from a trained, seasoned expert in the field of psychotherapy for sexual assault/trauma survivors, please contact Marianne Hurley, at 679 Mohawk Trail, Shelburne, MA 01370 or 413 625 8684.

Thank you very much for listening and for your interest in doing better by the women of the Commonwealth.

Anonymous

March 26, 2008

To: Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Needs of Adoptive Mothers

Many women in Massachusetts have had the joy of building their families through adoption. In some cases, our children come to us after experiencing early abuse or neglect; they may also have special needs in the areas of learning, social and behavioral interactions, substance dependencies, medical, physical and/or emotional challenges, and in some cases, attachment disorders. The support of schools and social service and adoption agencies becomes important in working to meet our children's needs.

Because of their unique life histories, children who have been adopted will undergo some developmental stages not experienced by their peers. They will go through stages of sadness and loss as they come to understand the finality of their separation from their birth families. Some will feel a drive to search for their birthparents. They will grapple with identity issues, often cross-racially and cross-culturally. During this time period, children will appear distracted in school, which is a normal developmental stage often misunderstood or misinterpreted by teachers. They may be distressed by being presented with insensitive school assignments in genetics or literature. As they become teens, our children can be vulnerable to sexual exploitation or acting out, and to strong emotions of rage and grief. Early abuse experiences may be revisited. Even with supportive families and friends, the stress on mothers and families can be intense. Parental and sibling relationships can be disrupted in attempts to effectively manage the child who is suffering. Some women have had to leave work repeatedly to respond to a child in trouble, thereby jeopardizing their jobs; or have left the workforce entirely to home school their special needs child when the school system has not been responsive. In some cases, when a child has acted out repeatedly, skipped school, or even been sexually assaulted by an adult, 51A reports have been filed on already traumatized mothers who are trying as hard as they can to stabilize their child and family.

There are several ways that schools and adoption and social service agencies can assist struggling adoptive mothers. Education on adoption issues must be provided to the appropriate staff members. Social workers, social service caseworkers, teachers and educational administrators should receive training and continued professional development on the needs of adoptive children and their families. Schools should not expect 'quick fixes' for children with significant emotional issues and educational needs; and should be creative in working to meet their needs. Adoption workers should disclose pertinent information on the medical, psychological, and socio-emotional background of the child and birth parents to prospective adoptive parents. A safe environment must be created for parents to seek help without fear of legal investigation or loss of reputation. Agencies should contact parents throughout their child's developing years, offering support and information on resources and interventions available for respite, stress management, behavioral management, and family support.

Please support women and children.

Mary McCarthy *mccarthy@arps.org*
Amherst, Massachusetts
March 26, 2008

March 24, 2008

Every Women Center
Re: Women's Issues Forum

I am unable to attend forum, however I would appreciate my voice being heard.

I believe we need change to WEP/GPO in Social Security.- wherein widows like myself are not denied their benefits, nor those of their deceased husband.

I had enough quarter of social security on my own previous earnings because I retired from State of Mass. When my husband was deceased I was denied both my own and my husbands Soc. Security.

I hear from many teachers, social workers, etc. that find themselves having to continue working or return to work because they are denied benefits that are rightfully theirs.

Can some changes be made to our Social Security system to help widows like myself? WEP/ GPO needs to be abolished.

Thank You.
Mary Raimandi- Vazquez
21 Western Drive
Agawam, MA 01001

From: Jess Wolfe [mailto:eljojawi71@yahoo.com]

Sent: Monday, March 24, 2008 9:45 PM

To: Mcsw (CSW)

Subject: Women air concerns

Good Morning-

I just read about the forum in Amherst to be sponsored by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. I was wondering if the topic of HIV/AIDS and Women has ever been addressed? I have been positive for over 15 years and because there is still so much of a stigma attached to this disease, I have found it hard to open and honest about my diagnosis, and therefore, only a few people know. I feel it is very important for young people, especially women, to know that just because they don't participate in risky behavior, pregnancy and STD's are not the only thing they have to worry about. When I read that Hampden County has the highest rate of teen pregnancy, I can see the right message is not getting across. Thank you for your time, I apologize if I sent this to the wrong address.

Sincerely,
Jessica